

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY PANAMA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3029

INFO AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 3 PANAMA 5542

FOR DEPUTY SECRETARY CHRISTOPHER AND ASST. SECRETARY TODMAN

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: SHUM, ES, PGOV, PINT

SUBJECT: HUMAN RIGHTS COORDINATOR DERIAN MEETS WITH SALVADORAN
PRESIDENT ROMERO

SUMMARY: STATE DEPT. COORDINATOR FOR HUMAN RIGHTS AND HUMANI-
TARIAN AFFAIRS MET ON AUGUST 2 WITH SALVADORAN PRESIDENT
ROMERO, VICE PRESIDENT ASTACIO, FOREIGN MINISTER CASTILLO
YANES AND MINISTER OF DEFENSE MARTINEZ. MEETING MARKED BY
FRANK EXPLANATION OF US CONCERNS AND INTERESTS WHICH ROMERO
SAID HE WELCOMES. MS. DERIAN STRESSED US CONCERN OVER THE
WELFARE OF CHURCH, CONSULAR PROBLEMS, AND NEED OF GOVERNMENT
TO ADDRESS REAL ECONOMIC PROBLEMS BEHIND CURRENT REPRESSION
AND GROWING POLITICAL ESTRANGEMENT OF GOVERNMENT. SALVADORANS
WERE VERY RECEPTIVE AND GAVE EVERY SIGN OF WISHING TO EASE
TENSIONS BETWEEN OUR COUNTRIES. THEIR VIEWPOINTS EXPRESSED
IN MOSTLY COURTEOUS AND GENERAL TERMS, APPARENTLY DESIGNED TO
AVOID FRICTION AND ENCOURAGE FUTURE DIALOGUE. MAIN THEME
WAS NEW ADMINISTRATION'S DESIRE TO RESTORE PEACE AND
TRANQUILITY AND TO REOPEN DIALOGUE WITH CHURCH AND
OPPOSITION POLITICIANS. SOME GENERAL REMARKS WERE
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ADDRESSED TO GOALS OF IMPROVING HEALTH AND EDUCATION
SERVICES. PRESIDENT STRESSED HIS SHORT TIME IN OFFICE,
IN EFFECT ASKING THAT WE GIVE HIM MORE TIME TO DEMON-
STRATE HIS GOOD INTENTIONS.

1. MS. DERIAN BEGAN CONVERSATION BY EMPHASIZING TWO
IMPORTANT AREAS OF CONCERN AND INTEREST TO USG: THE

CURRENT PROBLEMS OF THE CHURCH AND THREAT TO THE JESUITS AND THE GOVERNMENT'S PLANS TO ADDRESS THE FRUSTRATIONS ARISING OUT OF THE GREAT ECONOMIC INEQUITIES WHICH CHARACTERIZE SALVADORAN SOCIETY. SHE DREW ROMERO'S ATTENTION TO HIGH-LEVEL CATHOLIC AND PROTESTANT VISIT TO SECRETARY VANCE AND EXPRESSED PLEASURE THAT THREAT AGAINST JESUITS HAS NOT BEEN CARRIED OUT. IN STRESSING SECOND THEME SHE REFERRED TO THE USE OF GOVERNMENT POWER IN FACE OF POPULAR DEMANDS, STATING IT COULD BE USED TO PROTECT OR REPRESS THE PEOPLE. MS. DERIAN CITED FOLLOWING EXAMPLES OF KINDS OF ABUSE WHICH CAUSE CONCERN: PROLONGED DETENTION WITHOUT CHARGE, HOLDING OF PRISONERS INCOMMUNICADO, PHYSICAL AND MENTAL ABUSE INCLUDING TORTURE AND THE MANY FORMS OF MISTREATMENT SUCH AS HOODING AND TYING OF THUMBS WHICH ARE OFTEN USED BY FRIGHTENED LOW-LEVEL OFFICIALS IN MISGUIDED EFFORTS TO GAIN RESPECT. SHE STRESSED THAT NO INDIVIDUAL PERSON WOULD AGREE THAT SUCH PRACTICES WERE GOOD AND THAT THE US' HUMAN RIGHTS OBJECTIVE IS TO GET EVERY GOVERNMENT TO RESPOND THE WAY DECENT INDIVIDUALS WOULD. MS. DERIAN ALSO STRESSED USG CONCERN OVER THE WELFARE OF OUR CITIZENS WHO DISOBEY THE LAW OR GET CAUGHT UP IN SOMETHING LARGER. SHE EXPRESSED PLEASURE AT PRESIDENT ROMERO'S RECENT ASSURANCES THAT THE RIGHT OF CONSULAR ACCESS WILL BE

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PROVIDED. SHE ALSO EXPRESSED PLEASURE WITH HIS ASSURANCES THAT HE WILL BE TALKING WITH MANY DIFFERENT SECTORS WITHIN HIS SOCIETY. SHE ENDED BY NOTING THAT THE US HAS MADE ERRORS AT HOME AND ABROAD AND THAT WE HAD LEARNED FROM THOSE MISTAKES AND WANTED TO WORK WITH OTHER GOVERNMENTS TO IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF HUMAN RIGHTS. SHE NOTED THAT IN SOME AREAS, SUCH AS SUPPORT FOR THE HUMAN RIGHTS DECLARATION, THE GOVERNMENT OF EL SALVADOR HAD BEEN OUT AHEAD OF US AND NOTED THAT SHE CAME NOT IN A SPIRIT OF ARROGANCE OR WITH A LIST OF DEMANDS BUT RATHER AS A NEIGHBOR SEEKING A MUTUALLY BENEFICIAL DIALOGUE AIMED AT FINDING WAYS TO WORK TOGETHER TO IMPROVE THE LIVES OF THE PEOPLE OF ALL COUNTRIES.

2. PRESIDENT ROMERO RESPONDED TO THE POINTS RAISED BY NOTING THE MINISTER OF DEFENSE' RECENT PUBLIC DENUNCIATION OF THE THREAT AGAINST THE JESUITS AND SAID THAT HE BELIEVED THAT THE THREAT HAD NOW PASSED. HE WENT ON TO CITE DOMESTIC POLITICAL FACTORS STARTING WITH THE OPPOSITION'S CLAIMS OF ELECTORAL FRAUD WEEKS PRIOR TO THE BALLOTING WHICH LED THE WAY TO THE MASS DEMON-

STATION ON ELECTION DAY AND THE FINAL NEED FOR THE GOVERNMENT TO DISPERSE THE CROWD. ROMERO WENT ON TO SAY THAT HE WANTS TO OPEN A DIALOGUE WITH DIVERSE SECTORS OF SALVADORAN SOCIETY TO SEEK SOLUTIONS TO THE COUNTRY'S PROBLEMS, NOTING HE HAS ALREADY SPOKEN TO BUSINESSMEN, LABOR LEADERS, CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS, THE CLERGY AND OTHERS. HE DESCRIBED THESE AS POSITIVE MEETINGS AND PLANS TO MEET WITH THE OTHER TWO OPPOSITION PARTIES NEXT WEEK. THE PRESIDENT MENTIONED HIS COMMITMENT TO IMPROVING EDUCATION AND HEALTH SERVICES. HE SAID THAT HE BELIEVED GOVERNMENT RELATIONS WITH THE CLERGY WERE GETTING BETTER BUT NOTED THAT PROBLEMS STILL EXIST. HE CITED A RECENT ATTACK ON GOVERNMENT SECURITY FORCES AND TWO RECENT STREET DEMONSTRATIONS.
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ATIONS, WHICH HAD BEEN PEACEFULLY DISPERSED. HE SHOWED MS. DERIAN PHOTOS OF A RECENT DEMONSTRATION AND EXAMPLES OF ANTI-GOVERNMENT LITERATURE CONTAINING COMMUNIST THEMES AND MENTIONED THAT A PRIEST, FATHER ALAS, WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR DISTRIBUTING SUCH LITERATURE IN THE U.S.

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FM AMEMBASSY PANAMA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3030

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3. MS. DERIAN NOTED WITH PLEASURE THAT THE GOVERNMENT HAD REACTED PEACEFULLY TO THE DEMONSTRATION, LIMITING

ITSELF TO TAKING PICTURES AND EXPRESSED THE HOPE THAT THE PICTURES WOULD NOT BE USED TO RETALIATE AGAINST THE PROTESTERS. SHE NOTED EXAMPLES WHERE THIS HAD BEEN DONE IN THE US AGAINST CIVIL RIGHTS DEMONSTRATORS. SHE NOTED THAT EXTREMISTS GROUPS, BE THEY ON THE LEFT OR THE RIGHT, CAN CAUSE GREAT HARM BY DISRUPTING POSSIBILITIES FOR DIALOGUE AND THE PURSUIT OF PEACEFUL SOLUTIONS TO PROBLEMS. SHE DURTHER STATED THAT THE PRESIDENT'S REFERENCE TO SOCIAL WELFARE PROGRAMS WAS EXTREMELY IMPORTANT AND NOTED THAT WHILE THERE IS ALWAYS DISTRUST AT THE BEGINNING OF A NEW ADMINISTRATION, A CONSISTENT DEMONSTRATION OF COMMITMENT THROUGH ACTIONS AND PUBLIC STATEMENTS WAS NECESSARY TO OVERCOME THE CLIMATE OF POVERTY AND FEAR OF GOVERNMENT WHICH BREEDS EXTREMISM. SHE SUGGESTED THE UTILITY OF SYMBOLIC GESTURES SUCH AS AN INVITATION TO THE INTER-AMERICAN HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION AND ASSURANCES THAT THOSE KNOWN TO BE IN THE LOYAL OPPOSITION COULD RETURN TO EL SALVADOR AND TALK PUBLICLY AND PRIVATELY. SHE CAUTIONED AGAINST RELYING ON A COSMETIC PUBLIC RELATIONS APPROACH TO REAL PROBLEMS, AND STRESSED THE NEED FOR REAL CHANGES AND

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REFORM COUPLED WITH THE MAXIMUM OPENESS POSSIBLE.

4. THE PRESIDENT AGAIN STRESSEBUTHAT HIS WAS A NEW ADMINISTRATION, HE REITERATED A COMMITMENT TO CHANGE AND REFORM AND HIS DESIRE TO TALK TO VARIOUS SECTORS OF OPINION.HE STRESSED THAT THIS WAS A TWO-WAY STREET AND THAT GOVERNMENT HAD THE DUTY TO PROTECT THE PEOPLE FROM THOSE WHO VIOLATED LAW. HE CRITICIZED THE CHURCH FOR PREACHING ONLY TO THE POOR AND DISPOSSESSED, ARGUING THAT THIS ENCOURAGES CLASS HATRED. HE REGRETTEED THE FACT THAT THE ARCHBISHOP HAD NOT ASKED TO CALL ON HIM AND SAID HE WAS INVITING THE ARCHBISHOP TO COME AND TALK EARLY NEXT WEEK.

5. THE VICE PRESIDENT THEN DESCRIBED THE PROBLEMS CAUSED BY OVERPOPULATION AND LACK OF RESOURCES. HE STRESSED THE NEED FOR GREATER POLITICAL EDUCATION AND DESCRIBED A SERIES OF TELEVISION PROGRAMS TO BE INITIATED IN THE FALL. ONE SERIES WOULD HAVE EACH CABINET HEAD DESCRIBE THE FIVE-YEAR GOALS OF HIS DEPARTMENT AND GIVE PERIODIC PROGRESS REPORTS. ANOTHER WOULD EXPLAIN TO POLICE OFFICIALS AND THE GENERAL PUBLIC THEIR LEGAL DUTIES AND RIGHTS. HE ALSO SPOKE OF EFFORTS TO UPDATE THE LEGAL CODES TO SPEED JUDICIAL PROCEDURES.

6. THE FOREIGN MINISTER SPOKE NEXT SAYING HE WAS GLAD THE US HAD SENT A WOMAN TO SPEAK TO THEM AS A "BIG

SISTER" WHO COULD DELIVER A MESSAGE IN SOFT AND SWEET TONES WHICH MIGHT SOUND LIKE PRESSURE IF DELIVERED IN THE LOUDER VOICE OF A MAN. HE EXPRESSED PLEASURE AT THE US INTEREST IN HUMAN RIGHTS, REGRETTING THAT IT WAS NOT HEARD IN 1969 WHEN SALVADORAN RIGHTS WERE BEING ABUSED IN HONDURAS. HE EXPRESSED THE HOPE THAT
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IT WOULD BE USED TO SUPPORT SOME 80,000 SALVADORANS CURRENTLY WORKING IN GUATEMALA WHO HAVE BEEN THE OBJECT OF SERIOUS THREATS FROM PRIVATE GROUPS THERE.

7. THE PRESIDENT MENTIONED THAT SALVADOR HAS A PROBLEM WITH SUBVERSION. HE STRESSED THE DIFFICULTY IN REACTING TO THIS KIND OF THREAT AND RECOGNIZED THAT IT COULD BE OVERCOME ONLY IF SALVADORANS WORK TOGETHER. HE AGAIN EMPHASIZED THE NEED FOR INCREASED DIALOGUE AND MORE TIME. MS. DERIAN AGREED WITH THESE SENTIMENTS.

8. THE MINISTER OF DEFENSE SPOKE LAST STRESSING THAT THE SECURITY FORCES CAME FROM THE PEOPLE AND WERE BY AND LARGE RESTRAINED, ALTHOUGH UNDER PRESSURE UNFORTUNATE INCIDENTS CAN OCCUR. HE SAID THAT THE PRESIDENT HAD ISSUED EXPLICIT INSTRUCTION TO IMPROVE POLICE PROCEDURES AND TO AVOID AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE ANY INJUSTICE TO LIFE AND HUMAN DIGNITY WHETHER THE INDIVIDUAL CONCERNED WAS A TERRORIST OR A SIMPLE CITIZEN. WITH RESPECT TO US CITIZENS, HE SAID THAT THERE HAD BEEN MINOR PROBLEMS CAUSED BY SOME US CLERGY TAKING A STAND WITH LOCAL CLERGY AND SOME FOREIGNERS RESPONDING TO INTERNATIONAL PUBLICITY BY TRYING TO ENTER JAILS TO TAKE PICTURES. HE FELT THAT THE FORMER PROBLEM WAS NOW RESOLVED AND THE LATTER WAS A MINOR ONE.

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FM AMEMBASSY PANAMA

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9. MS. DERIAN OFFERED THE OBSERVATION THAT A GOOD WAY TO COUNTER ADVERSE INTERNATIONAL OPINION MIGHT BE TO INVITE THE INTERNATIONAL RED CROSS TO COME AND EXAMINE PRISON CONDITIONS. SHE STRESSED THE PRIVATE NATURE OF THE GROUP'S INVESTIGATIONS. SHE EXPLAINED THAT OTHERS ARE MUCH MORE LIKELY TO BE UNDERSTANDING OF EL SALVADOR'S PROBLEMS IF THE GOVERNMENT DEMONSTRATES OPENESS.

10. THE DEFENSE MINISTER RESPONDED BY NOTING THAT LEGAL PROCEDURES ARE FOLLOWED, THAT ONLY ONE WOMAN WAS BRUISED IN THE DISPERSAL OF THE ELECTION-DAY DEMONSTRATIONS CONTRARY TO REPORTS OF THOUSANDS KILLED, AND THAT THE NATIONAL RED CROSS HAD GOOD RELATIONS WITH THE SECURITY FORCES AND HAD WITNESSED THE DISPERSAL OF THE ELECTION-DAY DEMONSTRATORS.

11. THE PRESIDENT WRAPPED UP THE SESSION BY THANKING MS. DERIAN FOR A FRANK AND SINCERE EXPOSITION WHICH HE SAID HE WOULD TAKE INTO ACCOUNT IN THE FUTURE. HE WELCOMED THIS TYPE OF DIALOGUE AS NECESSARY TO AVOID MISUNDERSTANDINGS AND EXPRESSED THE HOPE THAT IT COULD BE REPEATED AGAIN.

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Message Attributes

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